

The Compassion Network Wiki-Canon

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Biographies of Bhiksunis (excerpts)

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Fascicle 1, [0934c03] 淨檢

Biography 1: Bhikṣuṇī Jingjian (Pure Selection), Bamboo Forest Monastery of the Jin Dynasty

Jingjian's lay surname is Zhong and first name Lingyi. A native of the City of Peng, her father Dan was the viceroy of Wuwei. Jingjian enjoyed learning at a young age. As a young woman, she was widowed and poor, so to make a living she often taught the children of elite families how to play instruments and how to read. Over time, as her faith developed and as she came to encounter the Buddha's teachings, she rejoiced -- though no one was available to answer her questions.

Later she meets Śramaṇa Fashi, someone thoroughly conversant in the Buddhism and its texts. During the Jin dynasty when he built a monastery on the west side of the city, Jingjian helped to construct it. Fashi spoke the Dharma for her and Jingjian experienced an enlightening moment. Considering her strengths and her wish to pursue the Dharma, she borrowed sutras from Fashi so that she would understand the meaning and the purpose of these texts.

One day, she asked Fashi, "The sutras mention 'bhikṣu s and bhikṣuṇīs'. I wish to reach the other shore of perfection and become a bhikṣuṇī."

Fashi said, "There are monks and nuns in India, but here in this land, the Dharma is incomplete."

Jingjian followed-up, "Since bhikṣu s and bhikṣuṇīs are together mentioned, why are their Dharmas different?"

Fashi replied, "Foreigners claim that bhikṣuṇīs maintain 500 precepts, which surely make them distinct. Let me ask my high master."

His high master explained, "The bhikṣuṇī precepts are generally the same as the monks but specific details differ, consequently women cannot receive these precepts until they acquire these laws of conduct. The bhikṣuṇīs keep the Ten Precepts, which they may receive from the Grand Monks. The only problem now is that they do not have bhikṣuṇīs who are high masters to depend upon."

Jingjian then immediately had her head shaved and received the Ten Precepts from this high master. Twenty-four others did the same and they established Zhulin Monastery by the west gate of the city. Given that they do not have any bhikṣuṇī teachers, they all consulted with Jingjian. Her virtues surpassed even that of a preeminent monk.

There was an Indian Śramaṇa Zhishan who lived in present-day Kashmir. He was tolerant, wise, elegant, and enjoyed meditation and recitation. During the latter part of the Yongjia reign during the Jin Dynasty, Zhishan left his home monastery and came to China, speaking to propagate Buddhism. At that time, people's faith was paltry and they did not know to pray or request the Dharma. During the first year of Jianwu reign, Zhishan returned to his country, present-day Kashmir. Later when Buddhacinga of India described Jingjian's virtues and actions, Zhishan lamented about not having known Jingjian.

Jianjing was restrained and lawful in selecting disciples and receiving offerings from donors. Her speaking of the Dharma and teachings were like a light breeze that caresses softly. During the Xiankang reign during the Jin Dynasty, Śramaṇa Sengjian acquired the Sangha Karmavajna and Precept Manual from Kuslana. On February 8th, the first year of the Shengping reign, foreign Śramaṇa Dharmagata was invited to establish a precept platform at Luoyang [the then capitol of China]. Śramaṇa Daochang Shi of Jin dynasty questioned him on the causes and conditions of the Precepts Manual, objecting to

Śramaṇa Sengjian's transmitting the precepts to women. Failing to obstruct the transmission, however, Daochang Shi left the precept platform thereafter.

Jingjian and four others were able to enter the platform built on a boat floating upon River Si and receive the Ordination Precepts from the Grand Monks. Jingjian of Jin Dynasty was the first ordained Buddhist nun in China.

On the day of the karmavajna, a rare scent permeated the place so that everyone smelled it. All were delighted and praised out of admiration. Jingjian therefore became more respected and believed. She cultivated the precepts well and never ceased to study them. The donations were plenty and she dispensed them as soon as she received them, always giving them to others before using them herself.

By the end of the Shengping reign, all again smelled the rare fragrance that permeated the air on the day of the karmavajna and saw a red energy too. One female being in heaven let fall multi-colored flowers from the sky. Jingjian was glad to see that and told the assembly, "Take care of my funeral arrangements well, I will be leaving." She waved goodbye and soared into space. The path that she traveled was like a rainbow that led straight into the heavens. She was 70 years old.

Fascicle 2, [\[0937b19\]](#) 慧果

Biography 1: Bhikṣuṇī Huiguo (Fruit of Wisdom) of Blessed Scenes Monastery

Huiguo's lay surname is Pan. A native of Huainan, she always practiced asceticism and never wore luxurious apparel. She enjoyed the moral codes and was pure in observing her precepts. Both monastics and laity members admired her so that her reputation spread far and wide. The feudal governor Beidi Chuan of the Song Dynasty Qingzhou was capacious, humane, and generous. He praised Huiguo highly and supported her handsomely. During the third year of Yongchu, he donated the eastern portion of his land for establishing a hermitage named Blessed Scenes. Huiguo was a role model. Whatever donations she received she gave them to the Sangha so that the assembly's good karma grew and everyone happily followed her commands.

By the sixth year of Yuanjia, Indian Śramaṇa Guṇabhadra arrived. Huiguo asked, "The first bhikṣuṇīs who received the ordination precepts did not leave behind any biographies, however, if we trace the transmission to Mahāprajāpatī, who was an excellent role model indeed, I wonder if latter generations of bhikṣuṇīs in India could have developed a different set of rules for receiving the precepts?"

He responded that no different rules were developed; the rules remained the same. She then inquired, "According to the precepts, the Precept Master gets to question the preceptees about their offenses, so how could the rules remain the same?"

He responded, "The Precept Master only inquires about the preceptees' offenses if they did not study for two years at a place where there are hikṣuṇīs."

She probed further, "Although there were no hikṣuṇīs in this country to begin with, it does not mean that there were never a hikṣuṇī world-wide."

The reply was, "The ethical guidelines established that the Complete Ordination Precepts are received from ten monks, but an exception is made for preceptees to receive the precepts from only five monks if the preceptees were located at the outskirts of a country. We cannot contradict the Dharma."

She furthermore asked, "How many miles away is a place considered the outskirts of a country?" The response was, "Beyond a thousand Chinese miles where mountains or seas are in the way."

By the ninth year of Yuanjia, Huiyi, Huikai, and five other disciples accepted the ordination precepts again from Sanghabahma, to respectfully and carefully uphold them as if they were their own valuable heads.

During the tenth year of Yuanjia, Huiguo passed away at more than 70 years of age. Her disciple Huikai was also known during her time for her character and conduct.

[Fascicle, 2 \[0937b08\]](#) 僧果

Bio 14: Bhikṣuṇī Sengguo (Sangha Fruit) of Vast Hills

Sengguo's lay surname is Zhao and her first name is Fayou. She is a native of Xiuwu, Ji County. Sincere and faithful by nature, she was wholesome and natural. She was never fed milk past noon as a baby. Her parents found her exceptional. When she reached adulthood, her mind became extremely focused. Since the conditions did not come together for her any earlier, she did not leave the homelife until the age of 27, at which time she attended to her bhikṣuṇī teacher Huitsong of Guangling.

Sengguo's observance of the precepts was solid and clear. Her meditative state was pure. Every time she entered meditative absorption, she would fail to realize that time had gone from evening to dawn. In spirit, she was in a constant state of purity though she appeared to be a withered tree. Consequently, some people who knew little about her were skeptical.

During the sixth year of the Yuanjia reign, a foreign merchant marine, Nandi, brought some bhikṣuṇīs from Simhala, [present day Sri Lanka], to the capitol city of Song dynasty and lived at Blessed Scenes Monastery. Later they asked Sengguo if any foreign bhikṣuṇī had visited this country before.

She answered, "Never."

They wondered again, "Then how did all those bhikṣuṇīs in the past receive the precepts from the twofold Sangha [of ordained monks and nuns]?"

She responded, "Only from the Grand Monks. The receiving of the precepts in the past was an expedient to foster sincerity, just as Mahāprajāpatī received the precepts based on the Eight Dharmas of Reverence while 500 nuns accepted Mahāprajāpatī to be their teacher."

Although Sengguo explained with this lofty example, she had her doubts. She checked with the Tripitaka Master though and got the same answer. She also asked to see if the nuns needed to receive the precepts again. The response was that precepts, meditation, and wisdom can be extremely subtle, so of course it would be best to receive them again.

During the tenth year of the same reign, merchant marine Nandi again brought eleven bhikṣuṇīs from Simhala, including Devasara and others. Those nuns who came earlier knew the language of Song dynasty, so they invited Samghavarman to Nanling Monastery's platform. More than 300 individuals received the precepts again.

During the 18th year of Yuanjia's reign, Sengguo was 34 and once meditated all day until the cantor purposely touched her, surmising that she was dead. The cantor, in shock, notified all the officers in the monastery so they may take a look. They saw that Sengguo's body was indeed cold and rigid but for the faintest of breaths. When they were about to move her body for cremation, Sengguo opened her eyes, talking and smiling as usual. Those who were fooled were scared and in awe. We do not know when she passed away.

[Fascicle 2, \[0937b15\]](#) 寶賢

Bio 21: Bhikṣuṇī Baoxian (Treasured Worthy) of Universal Worthy Monastery

Baoxian's original surname is Chen. She is a native of the County of Chen. Saddened by her mother's death at the age of 16, she did not eat grains for three years; instead she survived on arrowroot and taro that she planted herself. She did not wear luxurious clothing or lie down on beds or mats. Leaving the homelife at the age of 19, she lived at Jianan Monastery. She was diligent and well-versed in meditation and the moral discipline.

Emperor Wen of Song dynasty treated her with the most profound respect and offered her clothing and food. Emperor Xiaowu donated to her generously and respectfully, providing her with a sum of 10,000 dollars each month. When Emperor Ming took to the

throne, she got to see the emperor and receive even more frequent rewards.

During the first year of the Taishi reign, she was named the head of Universal Worthy Monastery. The second year, she was granted the position of Monastic Judge at the capitol. She had an awesome air about her and judged things swiftly and accurately. She applied principles so the falsely accused were certainly released. By nature she was tough, straightforward, and not at all biased.

Bhikṣuṇī Jingjian during the Xingping reign, Jin dynasty, started the line of bhikṣuṇīs [in China], receiving the ordination precepts from Grand Monks. When Huiguo, Jingyin, and others of Blessed Scenes Monastery checked with Gunavarman, Gunavarman told them, "Since there were no twofold assemblies in this country, women may receive the ordained precepts from the Grand Monks. When Huiguo and others later met foreign bhikṣuṇī Tasala, they re-took the ordination precepts from Gunavaraman of Nanling Monastery during the 11th year of the Yuanjia reign. It was not that they did not receive the precepts earlier, but that these were enhanced precepts for the sake of goodness."

Those who liked to be different spread such news and imitated this practice, though the rites were slightly deficient. During the second year of the Yuanhui reign, Dharma Master Luying started lecturing on the Ten Recitations Vinaya at Jingxing Monastery. Having heard Dharma Master Luying's lectures, more than ten bhikṣuṇīs wished to receive the precepts again. Baoxian then sent a representative of the Sangha Authorities to the lecture hall to execute her orders. The representative sounded the wooden blocks and announced to all the bhikṣuṇīs: do not re-take the precepts casually.

Furthermore, upon inquiry and after repenting, those who do not meet the minimum age requirement must have their master gather everyone, ask for permission from the Sangha Authorities. With approval and investigation, they may receive the precepts. If they give you the silent treatment or yell at you as a rejection, you should know that this will pass. After this incident, the [re-taking of precepts] in a competitive manner temporarily ceased for a while.

Baoxian was incorruptible, simple, and perspicuous during her term, applying her talents to weigh the facts against the principles and bringing peace to the congregation and benefits to subordinates. She was at ease and free from attachments since she had few desires. People respected her highly. At the age of 77, she passed away during the first year of the Shenming reign.